



INL's Mike Connolly recently told local business investors how INL and the Western Energy Corridor are poised to contribute solutions to energy security challenges the U.S. will face during the next decade.

## **INL's role in 'energy-rich corridor' emphasized to business leaders**

by Keith Arterburn, *INL Communications*

The United States faces a major energy security challenge during the next decade, and INL and the Western Energy Corridor are poised to contribute significantly to solving it. That was the message INL's Mike Connolly recently delivered to more than 80 people at the Grow Idaho Falls Investors Breakfast.

Connolly, deputy associate laboratory director for Energy and Environment, gave the keynote address at the Oct. 23 annual meeting.

"The Idaho National Laboratory is positioned nearly in the center of an energy-rich region that stretches from Canada south through the U.S.," he said.

The region contains rich coal basins, oil shale, oil sands, uranium, wind, biomass and geothermal from Alberta and Saskatchewan down through southern Colorado. He described solutions that would use combinations of energy systems including nuclear, fossil and renewable energy resources.

Although areas surrounding Idaho have rich fossil energy deposits, "Idaho has tremendous biomass resources in agricultural crops and forestry materials," Connolly said. He pointed to an agreement INL recently signed with the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. The partnership will pursue technologies that could boost harvesting efficiencies for Idaho crops and will research dedicated energy crops such as tall grasses that could be grown on nonagricultural lands.

Connolly also noted that other renewable energy sources such as wind and geothermal will be important.

And during the past several years, INL has led biomass processing research that would "maximize efficiency with single-pass harvesting" to capture food crops, along with leftover plant material that could generate bioenergy. He explained that INL designed the road map for the harvesting, transport and preprocessing of agricultural biomass.

Connolly also outlined how INL has been growing its regional relationships with Canadian provinces, as well as Montana, Utah, Wyoming and other states. INL has had exchanges with and conducted research for government organizations, regional academic institutions, other national laboratories and energy industry organizations. Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer, Utah Sen. Bob Bennett, and delegations from both Alberta and Saskatchewan have visited INL. And the lab has been working with federal departments of Defense and Interior, along with many other state and federal agencies.

America needs a national program to address unconventional fossil energy development so environmentally-responsible technologies and combined energy systems can be developed to provide the energy needed for the future, Connolly stressed.

As an honest and independent broker of information, INL can mitigate risks to energy systems and provide necessary research. High-end, simulation-driven engineering and prototype testing that provides real data will be necessary for the private sector and policymakers to make informed decisions, he said.

"Innovations alone will not result in success," he said.

[Feature Archive](#)